

THE ROLES OF WHATSAPP GROUP IN COUNSELLING ACADEMIC PROCESS: BEST PRACTICES AT UNIVERSITAS TERBUKA

Ucu Rahayu¹, Leonard R. Hutasoit², Maman Rumanta³

^{1, 2, 3}*Universitas Terbuka (INDONESIA)*

Abstract

Social media is one form of communication or interaction media which is effective today, because social media can overcome the problem of distance, time and cost of people who interact. Social media can not only be used as a medium for social and economic activities but also can be utilized in the learning process. This paper will describe the process of academic and academic administration counseling of Biology education students, Indonesia Open University from the year of 2015 to 2016 through social media WhatsApp. There are about one hundred students spread from various regional office, namely Surabaya, Bandung, Bogor, Bandar Lampung, Jambi, Medan, Batam, Semarang, Surakarta, Purwokerto, Jakarta, Pontianak and about 15 tutors who are involved in this WhatsApp group. From this counseling process, it was identified that there was a change of students who were active in a time period of WhatsApp discussion, and only a few lecturers who were active as resource persons. Meanwhile, the topics of discussion in the WhatsApp group include credit transfer, online tutorials, self-training, purchase of teaching materials, and exams. Coaching through the WhatsApp group has been effectively exploring and solving student problems. In the future, WhatsApp group is expected to reach more students so that more problems in the learning process are solved.

Keywords: Counselling, media social, WhatsApp, Universitas Terbuka.

1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of information technology, the internet has become a reliable means of public communication. Through the internet, the barriers to distance, time and cost of society in communicating can be minimized. This decade behind, the internet gave birth to a new network known as social media (Setyani, Hastjarjo, and Amal, 2013). Social media can also negate social status which is often a barrier to communication. Because of the ease of using it, anyone can use social media. Through social media, each individu has a chance to express opinions. Social media is a communication tool used by users in social processes (Mulawarman and Nurfitri, 2017). There is also an opinion that social media is a medium that uses web-based technology that transforms communication into interactive dialogue. Kaplan and Haenlein (2012) define social media is as a group of internet-based applications that are built on the basis of Web 2.0 ideology and technology, and which enable user- content creation and exchange. Social media is an online media which is used as a communication tool. Social media has social power that greatly influences the growing public opinion in the community, even according to Watie (2011) social media can shape people's opinions, attitudes and behavior. Social media is one form of internet-based communication favored by the Indonesian people. Social media that is developing at that time include Blackberry, Instagram, Facebook, Line and WhatsApp. WhatsApp is an internet-based instant messaging application that has increased since the last three years (Jumiatmoko, 2016) According to Amin (2018), about 87.1% of the people choose WhatsApp one of the social medias that is used by the community to communicate.

Whatsapp is a messenger application that can send photos, messages, audio and videos to communication opponents. In addition, Whatsapp can also be used to form groups or forums for a group of people to discuss, solve problems, chat, and others. The results showed that Whatsapp

application can help the learning process and improve motivation and cognitive (Larasati et al, ((2012); Bower (2008); Bertelsen & Bodker (2003). The results of Larasati et al (2012) showed that WhatsApp is an adequate medium effective in discussion of learning, the use of WhatsApp can improve students' cognitive and motivation (Bower 2008) and based on the results of Bertelsen & Bodker (2003), WhatsApp application users said that they felt very helpful in the learning process. Exchanging experiences and ideas, discussing academic and social matters as well as seeking or helping to solve difficulties encountered. In connection with this, WhatsApp social media has been used by the Open University Biology Education study program starting in 2016 to guide students related to academic administration problems. At first WhatsApp group was formed to facilitate communication, and student guidance on the implementation of online tutorials for Biology Learning Strategy courses, Evaluation of Biological Learning, Human Anatomy and Physiology, and Animal Development. However, then the direction of the discussion will develop according to the needs of students related to other information related to the learning process of students at the Indonesia Open University. Therefore, this paper will present the results of the study which is the experience of the Indonesia Open University, particularly the Biology Education Study Program in utilizing WhatsApp as a medium for academic administration guidance. The aspects to be described include the main topics discussed, the types of information discussed per topic, the time of discussion, the interaction process and the benefits of WhatsApp groups.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Research conducted is qualitative research. Retrieval is carried out from January to August 2017. The method used in this study is an observation of the process of mentoring students of the Biology Education study program through WhatsApp group which is equipped with a questionnaire related to WhatsApp group benefits. Respondents of this study amounted to 16 people who were status as lecturers or mentors and about 100 students of Biology Education scattered in regional office-UT Surabaya, Bandung, Bogor, Bandar Lampung, Jambi, Medan, Batam, Semarang, Surakarta, Purwokerto, Jakarta, Pontianak.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data obtained from observations is presented in the following:

3.1. *Scheduling Discussion Topics in the WhatsApp Group*

The Schedule of discussion topics in the WhatsApp group relevant to UT academic calendar, as listed in the following table.

Table 1. The schedule and topics discussion of WhatsApp

No	Discussion topics	Periodic of time (month)
1	Registration	January
2	Practical work, final task of program, PKP	January
3	Learning materials	January, February, March, April
4	Score of exam	January, last April
5	Online Tutorial	February, March, April,
6	Final exam	Mei

No	Discussion topics	Periodic of time (month)
7	Credit transfer	January, June
8	Yudisium	January, August
9	Graduation	Mei
10	Other information: seminars, free of school book, services of online bank, etc	Disperse

Table 1 above shows that the topics discussed by students in group are related to the student learning process at the Open University. Although there is no topic scheduling by the admin or study program, the topics discussed are spontaneous and take place in accordance with UT's academic calendar. In January, when the academic calendar sets a schedule for registration. The most important topics are related to the problems of course registration and the purchase of teaching materials. Around March and April where the academic calendar sets a schedule for online tutorials, the discussion and mentoring forums are more dominant in talking about online tutorials. From the table above, it can be defined that the purchase of teaching materials is a topic that has quite a longtime discussion, from January to April. While other topics that are not related to the activities contained in the academic calendar are spread, the time cannot be determined.

3.2. Types of Problems in Coaching through WhatsApp Groups

Problems raised by students on each discussion topic can be repeated. At the beginning of WhatsApp group was formed, student problems tend to be answered by the head of the study program or lecturers. However, when the similar problems were questioned by other students, the students who had experienced in the same problems answered the questions or sharing experience with the other students. The types of problems discussed in the Biology Education Study Program group are listed in the following table.

Table 2. Types of problems discussed in each topic in the Biology Education WhatsApp group

No	Discussion topics	<i>the Type of problems discussed</i>
1	Registration	When/schedule for registration closing? Where the students can pay for registration. Asking to other students how the level of difficulty of the course to be registered., How much is the registration fee per course? Comparing registration fees per credit t, How to smoothly pay registration at BRI Bank, Mandiri Bank, BTN Bank or BNI Bank -through Indomaret / Alfamart store? payment process
2	Learning materials	How to buy books through an online bookstore? What is the website address and telephone number of Karunika Online Bookstore? Invitation to exchange books, who wants to buy used modules? Think about borrowing a book or buying a copy of the original learning material. Why online bookstore can't be accessed. Virtual reading room Topics of digital teaching materials, Difficulty purchasing book on online bookstore
3	Score of exam	When the result of exam will be announced? Why the result of exam didn't come out? Why the result of exam is E? Explain the value gained by the carbon chain. Request a policy to be given a course. Assisted opening / viewing the result of exam. -

No	Discussion topics	the Type of problems discussed
4	Online Tutorial	How to activate online tutorial. How to send - online assignments, the tutor is not active, there is no upload task facility, it is difficult to access – online tutorial in his area, – to make sure whether the assignment has been received or not because the tutor has never answered or responded, telling the tutor who is late sending initiation or learning online material
5	Practical work	Who is taking the semester practicum (so that you can take the practicum together)? Who one ever took the practicum? What is the procedure when joining the practicum? regional office officers (who) can be contacted if they are going to join the practicum at another regional office / regional office place? How to make a practicum report? How much does it cost to repeat the lab? When, where and how do you do the practice? Give encouragement that the practical course is fun
6	PKP (professional practices of a teacher)	What and how should be done when taking PKP
7	Final task of Program	Has anyone participated in the final task of program? What are the requirements for taking the final task of program exam? Asking whether he was included in the final task of program?
8	Final exam	Asking which exam? What courses and what time? Examination about difficult or easy questions, difficult to do final exam, relevance between independent exercises (LM) with final exam questions, how to print the test cards for the test participants, meet with observers from the study program (UT center)
9	Credit transfer	How is the credit transfer procedure? Has the credit transfer been completed? What number of credits and courses must be taken when transferring credit? If graduates from S1 biology are pure then what courses must be taken? If the background of education is from agriculture, what subjects must be taken? What files should be sent when transferring credit?
10	Judicium	Is she/he on the list of judicium? What are the prerequisites for judicium? Pray for each other so that they can be completed immediately
11	Graduation	Give a congratulation graduation to other students who finished study. Pray for each other to immediately graduate.

The table above shows that the types of problems asked in the guidance process through this group are more likely to be related to What questions? Who? and How does the process take place? Guidance material / topic in this WhatsApp group only concerns the learning process at UT. from the beginning of the formation of the WhatsApp group, all members and admin have agreed not to discuss hoax material or even material / topics outside the learning process at UT. even if there is material that is not related to the material / topic of the learning process at UT, which is related to scholarships, practicum training outside UT, and the successes achieved by UT students.

3.3. Information Interaction Pattern

In general, student coaching through WhatsApp group is a part of UT's academic administration services to students. Academic administrative guidance that occurs is "sharing" from friends who have had earlier experience. Friends who have first experience will guide new students by sharing

information, except for questions regarding the authority of the Head of Study Program, such as questions related to final task program, students who are graduated, and the completion of the credit transfer process. However, at the beginning of WhatsApp group formation, students were more often guided by the Head of Study Program or lecturer. However, if there is doubt or lack of accuracy in answering. Head of study program as group administrator will immediately clarify. If there are repeated questions, then usually students who already know and have been involved in the previous discussion will copy and paste the answers.

3.4. Benefits of WhatsApp Group

Based on the results of questionnaires given to students and lecturers, there are many benefits of the student coaching process using WhatsApp groups, which are as follows.

3.4.1. Benefits for Students

As Members of the WhatsApp Group students get benefits as follows: (a) Adding friends from various regions in Indonesia. UT students who have rarely met and communicated with their friends, due to limited face-to-face classes, could communicate through WhatsApp groups. (b) Get information quickly from the study program manager. Before the existence of WhatsApp group, students had difficulty communicating and managing the study program or lecturer. Through this group WhatsApp, students can freely ask for a break from the study program related to the learning process at UT. (c) Get feedback / answers to problems faced quickly by the study program lecturers. Before the existence of WhatsApp group, students need a relatively long time to get instructions / guidance from the study program related to a problem. Through this WhatsApp group, students can quickly get information from the study program. (d) Get to know the lecturers directly. Before the existence of WhatsApp group, students never knew the head of the study program and the lecturers. Through this WhatsApp group, students can get to know the head of the study program more closely. (e) Increase learning motivation of students. Through WhatsApp group students feel they have comrades who give each other encouragement so that it increases student learning motivation. This is relevant to the opinion of Bower (2008) and Bertelsen & Bodker (2003), where their respondents who use the WhatsApp application in the learning process feel very helpful and increase the enthusiasm of learning, sharing experiences and ideas, discussing academic and social issues and seeking or helping solve the difficulties faced. (f) Can learn from fellow friends. Through WhatsApp group, students can learn from other students whether it is related to the student process or enthusiasm in learning.

3.4.2. Benefits for lecturers

In addition to students, WhatsApp groups also have benefits for lecturers. WhatsApp group benefits for lecturers, namely: (a) Lecturers get information related to the learning process directly and quickly from the field (b) Lecturers are aware of the problems faced by students (c) Lecturers can recognize the character of their students who have various backgrounds. (d) WhatsApp facilitates the search for data related to students or scholars. From the descriptions above, it can be identified that WhatsApp has benefits for the learning process in distance higher education, where there is a limited meeting between lecturers and students. WhatsApp can bridge the communication needs between lecturers and students. This is consistent with the results of several other researchers (Prajana, 2017; Jumiatmoko, 2016). Jumiatmoko (2016), states that WhatsApp groups have pedagogical, social and technological benefits. WhatsApp groups can be used as learning innovations for students, teachers or lecturers. Praijana (2017) proved that WhatsApp can be used as e-learning.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the results of this study, it can be concluded that (1) the guidance schedule through WhatsApp group follows the academic calendar of UT, (2) The topics of student problems asked by students in the student deduction through WhatsApp group are registration, teaching materials, score of exam, examination, online tutorial, credit transfer, graduation, and courses, (3) There are two communication patterns, namely problems arising from students and then responded by previous students and then clarified by the head of the study program, and problems arising from students and are immediately explained by the head of the study program, (4) WhatsApp membership was initially deliberately collected, followed by mouth to mouth 'asking to be invited' as a member, and WhatsApp is beneficial for students and lecturers as a bridge for communication and media to solve problems.

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